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ABSTRACT

In making the transition to preschool, some children exhibit behaviors that demonstrate an inability to function independently during parts of the school day. One such behavior is clinging, or the need for unusually frequent physical contact with the teacher. This study evaluated the efficacy of a social skills package and Premack contingency (reinforcement of intervals of non-clinging and appropriate attention-requesting behaviors) to reduce inappropriate behaviors in one female, 4-year-old child. The social skills package was used to teach the child (along with the class as a whole) to engage in appropriate attention-seeking behaviors, while the Premack contingency was implemented to systematically increase the non-occurrence of inappropriate behavior. Compared to the baseline condition, in which the teacher routinely pleaded with the child to desist the behavior, implementation of the interventions dramatically decreased the occurrence of inappropriate clinging and attention-seeking. The frequency of appropriate attention-requesting behaviors increased for the individual child and for the class as a whole. (Contains eight references.) (EV)

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REDUCTION OF INAPPROPRIATE "CLINGING" BEHAVIORS IN A PRESCHOOLER THROUGH SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING AND UTILIZATION OF THE "PREMACK" PRINCIPLE

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ABSTRACT

This research study evaluated the efficacy of a social skills package and a Premack contingency to reduce inappropriate clinging and attention-seeking behaviors in a preschool child. The social skills package was used to teach the child to engage in appropriate attention-seeking behaviors. The "Premack Contingency" was implemented to systematically increase the non-occurrence of inappropriate clinging and attention seeking behaviors. Inappropriate clinging and attention-seeking behaviors decreased dramatically following the treatment condition, and the frequency of appropriate attention-requesting behaviors increased.

Reduction of Inappropriate "Clinging Behaviors in a Preschooler Through Social Skills Training and Utilization of the "Premack" Principle

Each year, many young children enter preschool. Although the adjustment to the preschool setting may be difficult, most children seem to adjust well. However, some children do not adjust well and demonstrate behaviors that can be either inappropriate or unacceptable in a school setting.

While the literature has extensively studied problematic disruptive behaviors (Greenwood, Walker, Todd, & Hops, 1979; Lewis & Sugai, 1993; Pray, Hall, & Markley, 1992), some children exhibit behaviors that demonstrate an inability to function independently during parts of the school day. Many young children hug their teacher and such a behavior is not considered inappropriate. However, it is deemed problematic when it occurs at an unusually frequent level. This constant need for physical contact with the teacher involves constant clinging to the teacher's body. This constant clinging behavior presents a problem to the teacher in that it restricts her ability to manage and/or interact with other children and is therefore deemed inappropriate.

Social skills training packages have received considerable empirical support (Ammerman & Hersen, 1986; Kern, Miller, & Eggers, 1983; Odom, Hoyson, Jamieson, & Strain, 1985; Torgrud & Holborn, 1992). However, the application of social skills training to a behavior involving a child's dependence on the teacher (physically and emotionally) has not been studied. Similarly, contingency management techniques have received empirical support for treating many classroom behaviors of young children (Fee, Matson, & Manikam, 1990; Lewis & Sugai, 1993), but not with this type of preschool problem.

This study investigates the effects of a multifaceted intervention plan to decrease inappropriate clinging and attention seeking behaviors in a preschool child.

METHOD

Subject and setting

One female four-year-old preschool child served as the subject in this study. The child met the criterion for inclusion in the study, which was a score of 80 or better on the Teacher Screening Measure[1], as well as parental consent to participate in the study. The child's preschool teacher completed the Teacher Screening Measure Questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of 16 behavior descriptive items

that assessed the extent of the child's inappropriate clinging and attention seeking behaviors. [1]

The Teacher Screening Measure Questionnaire was modeled after the Teacher Social Rating Scale developed by Greenwood, Walker, Todd & Hops (1979). Each behavior-descriptive item was marked on a 7-point bipolar rating differential. The subject scored 98 out of 112 possible points, indicating that clinging and attention-seeking behaviors were at problematic levels.

The study took place in the child's preschool classroom and outside areas. The classroom was equipped with standard children's desks and materials. There were 25 children enrolled in the class during the study. The teacher was trained by the first author to collect data through viewing of child-teacher interaction on videotape and in-vivo practice in the classroom. When agreement between the first author and teacher reached 80% agreement or better in both types of training, data collection for the study was initiated.

The teacher served as primary observer in this study. She was a California credentialed preschool educator, specializing in preschool and kindergarten-aged children. The teacher's aide was utilized in supervising the classroom during periods of data collection by the teacher.

1. available from first author upon request.

The social skills curriculum utilized for the subject was also provided to all the child's classmates during training sessions. However, data were not collected on any other children. Allowing all children to participate in the social skills group decreased the likelihood of the subject being singled out and allowed all the children to benefit from the social skills discussion.

Data collection

Inappropriate clinging and attention seeking constituted the two primary dependent measures. Any of the three following components of clinging were considered to comprise an occurrence of clinging behavior: (a) hugging, (b) hand holding, and (c) following. Hugging was defined as the child hugging the teacher with one or two arms and not releasing upon request by the teacher or hugging again immediately following a request to release the hug. Holding hands was considered pulling on an adult's arms or swinging an adult's arms as well as holding an adult's hand. Following was defined as walking alongside or behind an adult when asked not to do so and when it was inappropriate to do so (i.e., during class time). The occurrence of one or more of these observable components constituted an occurrence of clinging behavior.

Attention seeking was scored separately and was defined as asking several questions at once and/or repeatedly asking

for help. Examples of attention seeking included repeatedly (a) seeking out the teacher, (b) coming to the teacher's desk, and (c) asking for help. In this study, the first 2 hours of the child's school day were selected as observation and data recording periods. Based on informal conversations with the teacher, those periods were selected as the teacher identified the problem behaviors to be more likely to occur during the first 2 hours.

Interobserver reliability

Reliability checks were taken during 20% of the data collection segments across all conditions in this study. During reliability checks, the teacher and reliability observer (first author) simultaneously recorded target behaviors of the child during a designated period. Reliability was assessed in the following manner. A timer set for 10-minute intervals alerted the reliability observer and teacher to begin each data collection segment.

Agreement of observers was scored when both observers marked the occurrence of clinging behaviors on the target child in the same 10-minute reliability check time interval. A disagreement was scored if one observer found an occurance of an attention-seeking behavior and the other observer did not record the occurrence of this same behavior in the same time interval. The percentage of observer agreement was calculated by dividing the number of observer agreements of

occurrence only, by the number of observer agreements plus disagreements of occurrence and multiplying by 100%.

Experimental design and conditions

The experimental design utilized was a single subject AB design. The baseline condition was followed by the treatment condition, involving a social skills training package, and a "Premack reinforcement contingency".

Baseline condition. During baseline, the teacher was instructed to record the frequency of clinging and attention-seeking behaviors in blocks of 10-minute intervals. The teacher and aide engaged in their normal everyday activities and schedules. The teacher responded to the child in the manner identified by her as common and appropriate. In the past, the teacher would often plead with the subject to not engage in the clinging or attention seeking behaviors when they occurred. In order to systematically study the efficacy of pleading to reduce clinging and attention seeking, the teacher was trained to respond to the child's clinging and/or attention-seeking behaviors by immediately pleading with the child to desist the behavior every time. The teacher responded with pleading requests such as "Please sit down; we can't hug now," "No, we can't hold hands now," or "You can walk with me at recess, but not in the classroom." Several variations

of these pleading responses were identified by the teacher and researcher prior to use during the baseline condition for use in this condition.

To ensure that pleading occurred systematically, the teacher was given feedback as to the rate of pleading. The percentage of clinging and attention-seeking behaviors responded to in a pleading manner was provided to the teacher after each session in baseline.

Treatment conditions. The treatment condition involved an intervention package that consisted of two components: (a) social skills training and (b) reinforcement of intervals of nonclinging and appropriate attention-requesting behaviors. The teacher served as the social skills trainer to the entire classroom of children. The teacher was taught by the examiner to deliver a social skills package consisting of instruction and modeling to the children.

Presented in a package program, the social skills training included instruction on appropriate hugging, hand holding, etc. The focus of the classroom instruction was to teach the importance of appropriate displays of affection at appropriate times, with a child verbal request preceding the behavior. The instruction was interactive with the teacher modeling the appropriate behavior and then allowing the children to demonstrate appropriate affection-seeking behaviors during the instruction.

In order to teach this skill, a behavioral rehearsal format was used. The children were required to ask permission for hugs, hand holding, following, and seeking out behaviors. If the teacher responded to the request with a "yes," then the child received the requested behavior. This included hugging, hand holding, or being allowed to walk with the teacher. However, if the teacher responded with a "no" to the request, then the child had to accept the "no" by moving away from the teacher and could not ask again at that time. The children practiced each of these behaviors, to "yes" and "no" teacher responses, several times during the training. For further delineation of the training procedures the reader is referred to McNamee (unpublished dissertation, 1995).

The second component of the treatment condition was the implementation of a Premack contingency, i.e., utilization of high probability behavior to reinforce a low probability behavior. The target child was allowed to win points for demonstrating attention-requesting behaviors during designated appropriate times and restraining for periods of time from clinging to the teacher during class time. For each 10-minute period that the child did not cling, the subject received points toward hugs from the teacher to be redeemed at the end of each hour.

If the child did cling during this period, she did not earn points and the interval was re-set to the full 10 minutes. The child also earned points if she appropriately hugged and made verbal requests for hugs or hand holding during redemption time (appropriate time). To redeem points, the child had to ask for the hug or attention at the appropriate exchanging time. However, if the child failed to do so, the teacher prompted the child and reminded her of the correct manner to request attention, if necessary. The teacher was trained by the first author on the correct implementation of this program.

RESULTS

The mean percentage of observer agreement for clinging behaviors was 95%, with a range from 80 to 100%. The mean percentage of observer agreement for attention-seeking behavior was 94%, with a range of agreement from 87.5 to 100%.

Results of the study indicated a decrease in both clinging and attention-seeking behaviors in the experimental condition when contrasted with the baseline condition (see Panel 1, Figure 1). During the baseline the child demonstrated a moderate frequency of clinging behaviors (4 or 5 occurrences). The frequency of attention seeking was much higher during baseline (7 and 8 occurrences).

Insert Figure 1

During the experimental condition, the frequency of clinging behaviors in the experimental condition dropped to two occurrences on the first day and no occurrences for the rest of the condition. Attention-seeking behaviors dropped to two occurrences for all but the last day (one occurrence on the last day).

The frequency of reinforcement for the child's appropriate attention-seeking behaviors under the Premack contingency was high. The child earned attention and appropriate hugs from the teacher (as a result of non-clinging behavior) between 4-8 times, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the program.

DISCUSSION

This research study investigated the efficacy of utilizing a social skills training package and a Premack contingency to reduce clinging behaviors in a preschool child. Following the implementation of the social skills package and the Premack contingency, the child's inappropriate clinging and attention-seeking behaviors decreased.

According to the teacher's anecdotal report, the child's attention seeking behaviors became more socially acceptable and limited to relevant situations (e.g. when preceding help for a task). A follow-up interview with the teacher revealed the child maintained appropriate attention-

seeking behaviors and demonstrated no clinging behaviors a month after the study.

An ancillary anecdotal finding was noted by the teacher in addition to the results specific to the targeted child. A change in the class' behavior was recognized by the teacher for the majority of the children who participated in the social skills training. The teacher reported that the class as a whole not only decreased attention seeking, but also maintained appropriate behaviors throughout the month following the study. During the study, the children of the class often demonstrated appropriate social skills, (e.g. requesting attention) without teacher prompt or intervention. The teacher reported a significant positive change in the overall behavior of the children in the class which enabled her to more effectively teach lessons. Upon the 1-month follow-up, the teacher expressed overall satisfaction in teaching the class due to the decrease in attention-seeking behaviors of the class as a whole.

The package of social skills training and reinforcement for the non-occurrence of inappropriate clinging and attention-seeking reduction produced significant changes in the target child's behavior. Further, anecdotal reports from the teacher indicated that social skills training was effective in teaching appropriate behavior to many children in the class. Further research should address the efficacy

of skills training packages for additional social skills needed by young children in preschool classrooms.

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Figure 1 Rates of targeted behaviors for baseline and experimental conditions

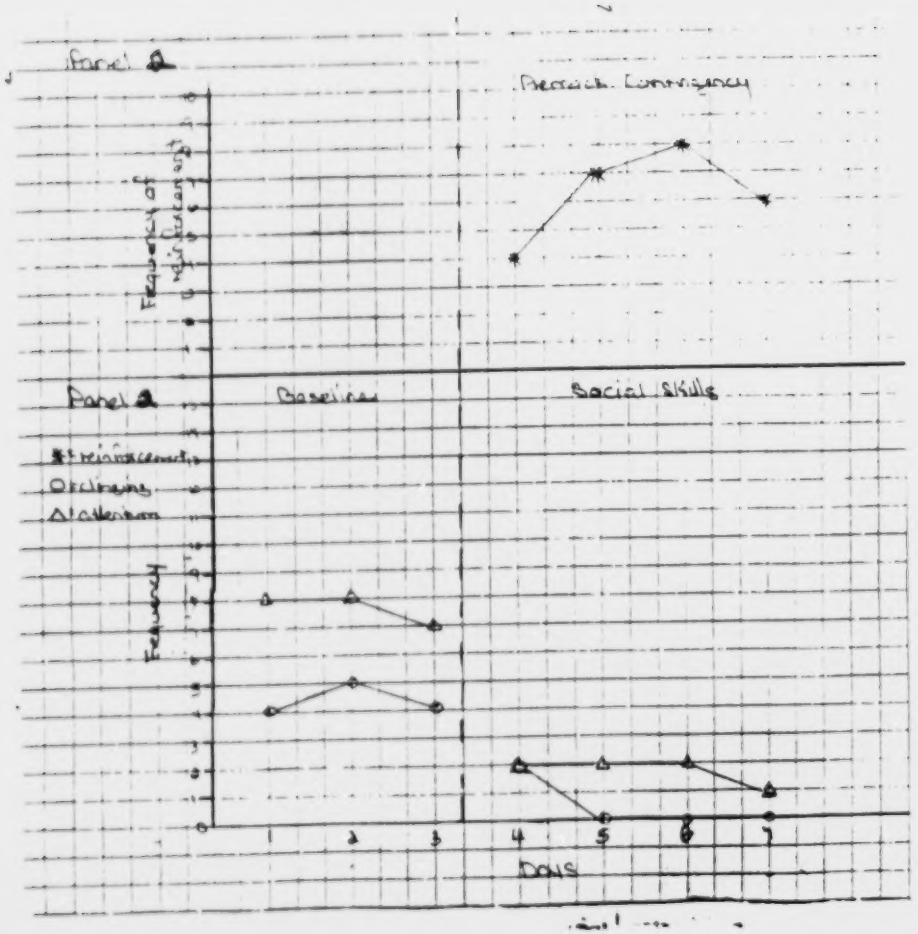

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Figure 1

Frequency of Two Target Behaviors

Across Baseline and Treatment

	Baseline			Treatment Package			
Sessions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Behaviors							
Clinging	4	5	4	2	0	0	0
Inappropriate Attention Getting	8	8	7	2	2	2	1